DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 413 046 PS 025 814

AUTHOR Cromer, Janis L.
TITLE The State of Our Nation's Youth, 1997-1998.
INSTITUTION Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans, Inc., Alexandria, VA.
PUB DATE 1997-00-00
NOTE 32p.
AVAILABLE FROM Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans, Inc., 99 Canal Center Plaza, Alexandria, VA 22314; phone: 703-684-9444; fax: 703-548-3822; e-mail: HoratioAA@aol.com; www: http://www.horatioalger.com
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Adolescents; Aspiration; Attitude Change; Career Choice; Discipline; Extracurricular Activities; Family Life; Family Relationship; Family Size; High Schools; *Interests; Marriage; National Surveys; Parent Child Relationship; School Attitudes; Social Attitudes; *Student Attitudes; Student Motivation; *Well Being; Work Attitudes; Youth Problems
IDENTIFIERS *Adolescent Attitudes; Leisure Activities

ABSTRACT

This report compares results from the 1997 national study of the current attitudes of American teenagers with similar 1974, 1983, and 1996 surveys. Participating were 334 students between 14 and 18 years of age, from households representative of the national population in geographic distribution, population density, household size, age of household head, and family income. Males and females are equally represented. Findings are presented in four major areas. "The School Year 1997-98" presents overall marks for schools, time spent on homework per week, and attitudes toward the school's grading system, relevance of high school learning, strictness of school rules, teachers, school discipline, coursework, co-curricular activities; and students' educational goals and aspirations. "Family Life" covers relationships with family members, and parental enforcement and fairness of rules. "The World Around Them" deals with youth's views of the worst influences facing them today and ratings of the severity of national problems. "The Future" covers personal, educational, and occupational plans following high school, reasons for seeking higher education, top career choices, salary expectations, factors believed to be important in personal success, and views on life goals, marriage, and children. (KB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

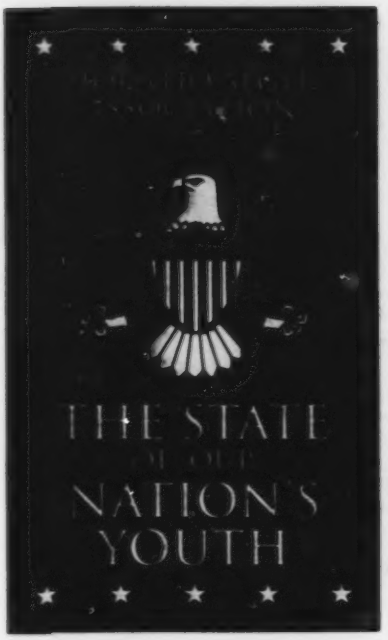
PS

THE STATE OF OUR NATION'S YOUTH

ED 413 046

1997-1998

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.



PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN OTHER THAN PAPER COPY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Margaret J Slipek
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

PS 025814

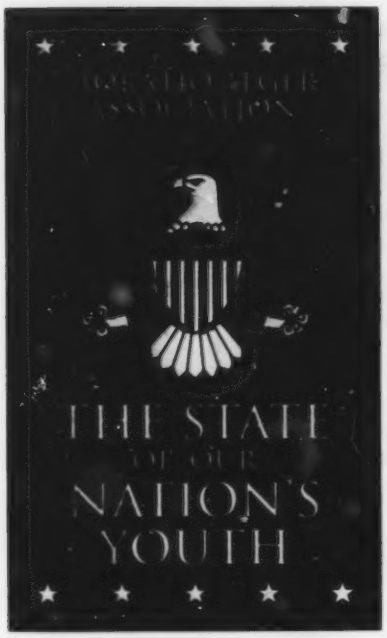
HORATIO ALGER ASSOCIATION

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

THE

STATE OF OUR NATION'S YOUTH

1997-1998



Copyright © Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans, Inc., 1997.
All rights reserved.

HORATIO ALGER ASSOCIATION

Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans, Inc.
99 Canal Center Plaza
Alexandria, Virginia 22314
Phone (703) 684-9444 FAX: (703) 548-3822

E-MAIL: HoratioAA@aol.com
Visit us on the Internet: http://www.horatioalger.com

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements v

Introduction 1

Foreword 2

The Survey 4

At a Glance 5

The School Year 1997-98 6

Family Life 14

The World Around Them 16

The Future 18

About the Horatio Alger Association 24

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THE STATE OF OUR NATION'S YOUTH IS AN ANNUAL EFFORT TO GIVE voice to what's on the minds and in the hearts of the country's young people. In undertaking this important project, the Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans is honored to have partners who share our dedication to bringing the hopes, dreams, opinions and concerns of our children to the attention of the nation.

First and foremost, the Association is grateful to its Board of Directors and all of its members for their strong, continuing commitment to this effort. We extend a special note of appreciation to Association members George and Judie Argyros, Terry and Patti Giles, Richard and Nancy Knowlton, and James and Louise Moffett for their generous support of this study.

Additionally, special thanks are offered to Association members Wally Amos, Maya Angelou, John O. Hershey, Art Linkletter, Colin Powell, John Silber and Arthur E. Turner for their guidance in the development of these reports. Our organization also is indebted to Sandra Welch and the Teacher Resource Service of the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) for their work in bringing the Horatio Alger Association's message of determination and inspiration to the American public.

The Association would also like to express its gratitude to educational analyst Janis L. Cromer, author of this report, whose work on previous youth opinion research studies now provides a three-decade perspective on the attitudes and beliefs, wishes, and worries of the nations most precious commodity — its children.

INTRODUCTION

For a half century, the Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans has been listening to the nation's young people — listening to their hopes and fears and trying to replace those worries with dreams and aspirations.

Founded in 1947, the Horatio Alger Association was created to demonstrate that the American dream was a truly attainable goal for all citizens who, through hard work, honesty, and determination, could overcome any obstacles. The Association reaffirms this critically important goal each year by identifying outstanding role models whose lives are characterized by great success, triumph over adversity, and an abiding commitment to help others. And as it honors these American traditions of both the past and present, the Association, through an ever-expanding array of educational efforts, gives hope, inspiration, and assistance to the young people of this nation.

One such initiative, made possible through the continuing generosity of its members, is the Association's National Scholars Program. Each year, this program awards more than $1 million in college scholarships to promising high school seniors who, like the Association's Members, have confronted and vanquished some of life's most forbidding roadblocks.

This report, *The State of Our Nation's Youth*, represents another of our organization's efforts to hear what is in the hearts and minds of young people. In publishing this annual back-to-school survey, we hope to give voice to our teenagers' thoughts and opinions and, in doing so, find other listening ears. Our youth have much to say, and if we are to be the compassionate and thoughtful guardians of their best interests, we must understand and appreciate their concerns and motivations, their expectations and opinions.

James R. Moffett
Chairman
Horatio Alger Association

George L. Argyros
President & CEO
Horatio Alger Association

FOREWORD

EVERYONE INTERESTED IN THE EDUCATION OF OUR YOUTH MUST BE indebted to the Horatio Alger Association for providing this picture of how high school students view their schools, their families, and their future.

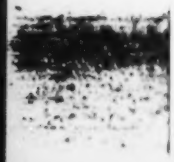
The most significant conclusion to be drawn from reading the findings is that things are not as bad as the pessimists, the Cassandras, would like us to believe. Although everyone but the teachers seems to believe that the majority of American schools are in bad shape, this is not what the students think. In national surveys taken from 1974 to 1997, three-quarters of the respondents have consistently given the schools a grade of B or better or said they were "doing a good job." Those who do so describe their schools and teachers in very positive terms and report doing well in school. Opinions about the quality and activities of teachers are similar.

Equally interesting is the fact that those who are positive on any item appear positive on most others. Doing more homework seems to correlate strongly with favorable opinions on school quality, or the way the teachers do their jobs. Slightly over a third believe discipline is a serious problem, but this group is disproportionately composed of students who complain that school rules are too strict or who down rate their schools or teachers.

It is fascinating to learn that the overwhelming majority of students, over 90 percent, see the need for learning mathematics, English, and computer programming. These, of course, are the basic skills. Almost half, 45 percent, say mathematics is their favorite subject; a trifle fewer, 44 percent, report that science is.

American students are clearly not turned off by education. Five-sixths of them, 84 percent, would like to continue their education after leaving high school, 62 percent in a four-year college and 22.5 percent in a community or junior college. The proportions have risen steadily since 1974, when only a third hoped to attend a four-year college.

These are career-motivated people. When they were asked how important various activities will be for personal success, the most common reply was "work and career," chosen by over four-fifths. But only a third say they seek a college education to "get a good paying job." A larger proportion, 37 percent, report personal improvement – the desire for "inde-



pendence," "more options," and "self-enrichment" – as the primary goals driving them to continue their education.

Not surprisingly, gender continues to differentiate behavior and goals in traditional ways. Boys are more likely to see mathematics as important; girls opt more for English. Girls still give much more emphasis to home (family living/home economics) and cultural subjects (foreign languages, music, and drama); boys lay more stress on business and vocational courses, as well as physical education. With respect to extracurricular activities, "substantially more boys than girls report participation in school athletics," whereas females are more disposed than males to be involved in academic and service clubs.

Parents also exhibit differential gender-related concerns. They are likely to establish rules about dating for girls, while boys are under more pressure with respect to career preparation. Females disproportionately aspire to teaching, non doctoral-level medical specialties, and nursing, as well as law. Males give more attention to engineering, computer development, law enforcement, and sports. And young women work harder in school and are more strictly monitored by their parents than young men. Even in 1997, girls in high school expect to earn considerably less than their male counterparts when they begin their career; 42 percent of the boys, as compared with 29 percent of the girls, believe they will earn $35,000 a year or more. But then more than twice as many females as males say the most important thing they want out of life is marriage and family; over twice as many males as females choose "financial success."

This report is important and should be praised for letting us know the distribution of sentiments among youths. But the differences among them are what we should expect: Private school students see their education as better than that of public school pupils, and in line with this, those from more well-to-do families evaluate the quality of their schools much more positively than do those from less privileged homes; also those who go to higher-rated schools do more homework than others.

Perhaps we may conclude that the world has not changed as much as some fear and others hope. Other surveys also indicate that the American Dream of achieving success through hard work and study is not dead.

Seymour Martin Lipset
Hazel Professor of Public Policy
The Institute of Public Policy
George Mason University

THE SURVEY

The State of Our Nation's Youth is a study of the current attitudes of American teenagers. In this report, students between the ages of 14 and 18 speak out on the people, institutions, and issues that are shaping their lives. In particular, as they are about to embark on a new academic year, they tell us their goals, concerns, and opinions about the months ahead.

Based on a national survey of 334 students, this report also compares the attitudes of today's young people with those of their 1996, 1983, and 1974 counterparts.[1]

The survey, conducted by NFO Research, Inc., questioned students selected from households that are representative of the national population in geographic distribution, population density, household size, age of household head, and family income. Quotas were established to ensure an appropriate representation of male and female respondents.

A total of 85% of the students responding to the survey were enrolled in public schools. Twelve percent of the students attended private schools, and 3% took part in other schooling options.

[1] Comparison data attributed to the following sources:

1996, *The Mood of American Youth*, Horatio Alger Association and National Association of Secondary School Principals

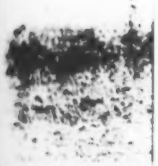
1983, *The Mood of American Youth*, National Association of Secondary School Principals

1974, *The Mood of American Youth*, National Association of Secondary School Principals

AT A GLANCE

The table below summarizes the major survey findings.

SCHOOLS	
Gave their schools an *A* or a *B*	73%
Average number of hours spent on homework per week	6.59
Satisfied with their school's grading system	85%
Believe the subjects they are learning will be useful after high school	80.6%
Believe their school rules are too strict	39.9%
Believe their teachers are interested in them and their concerns	76.3%
Believe discipline is a serious problem in their schools	37.8%
Courses that students feel are most important	Computers, Math & English
Favorite courses	Computers, Math & Science
Percentage involved in co-curricular activities	76%
Most important goals for the 1997-98 school year	• Improve grades • Make new friends
Agree that overcrowding is a problem at their schools	37.4%
Agree their schools need to be more technologically advanced	55.5%
FAMILY LIFE	
Percentage who have little or no difficulty in getting along with their mothers	83.2%
Percentage who have little or no difficulty in getting along with their fathers	78.6%
Family rules most strictly enforced	• Drinking alcohol & smoking • Completion of schoolwork • Curfews
TEEN AND NATIONAL PROBLEMS	
Worst influences affecting teens today	• Drugs • Peer pressure • Sex/poor morals
Top problem facing America today	Decline of family and moral/social values
THE FUTURE	
Percentage planning to attend a 4-year college/university	61.7%
Top reason for seeking further education after high school	Get a good paying job
Top career choices	Medicine & teaching
The one thing most wanted out of life	Happiness
Ideal age for marriage	24.4
Number of children desired	2.2



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

THE SCHOOL YEAR 1997-98

As today's teens look to the approaching school year, they are optimistic and determined. They have definite goals and confidence in their schools and their teachers. They want better grades, but they admit they don't study very hard. For the most part, they get along with their parents. They have big plans for the future and dreams of substantial salaries and happy families of their own.

The idealism of youth shines through almost all aspects of their lives, but they are far from blind or oblivious to the problems in their immediate lives and the challenges before them. Almost 40% say discipline is a significant problem in their schools. Half believe their schools need to have more books and materials and be more technologically advanced. More than a third say their schools are overcrowded.

They see drugs as the single worst influence on them and their peers, and they believe that crime and violence and a decline in social and moral values are the biggest problems facing America today. And they don't see those problems going away any time soon.

Yet, unlike the teens of the 1970s, today's youth do not appear to hold the adult world at arm's length and certainly show few signs of a major "generation gap." The teens of the '90s are also different from their '80s counterparts. They're less focused on career success and material gain, seeking a balanced future that would not, they say, be satisfying without a good family life.

THE YEAR AHEAD

A new school year. For many, the opening of classroom doors in late August or early September will always be the true start of the new year. Traditionally for students, it is a time of new beginnings, anticipation of different teachers, renewal of friendships put on hold by summer activities, expectations about new courses and new friends — and a fresh start.

As today's teens make plans for the 1997-98 school year, they indicate that "getting better grades" is a top priority, only slightly edging out "making new friends" as the number one goal for the new year. A total of 91.5% of the survey respondents said they agreed that they wanted to improve their grades in the coming year; 89.9% said that making new friends was a goal for the school year.

About two-thirds of the students said they planned to "take a broad variety of classes," and a little over half said they expected to participate in school sports activities.Clearly, free time will be at a premium for teens in the coming months because, in addition to working on their grades, their social lives, and their athletic pursuits, a large majority also hope to be working. Seven out of ten of the teens surveyed said they would be seeking employment opportunities in the upcoming academic year.

Teens today also anticipate that their schools will have some problems as the year gets under way. More than a third of the students (37.4%) said that overcrowding was a problem in their schools. And while private school students were much less likely to cite overcrowding as an issue at their schools, teens in both public and private schools frequently indicated that their schools needed more books and supplies and more technological resources. A total of 47.5% of the teens agreed with the statement, "I believe my school needs to have more books and materials available for the students." Even more students (55.4%) agreed their schools needed to be more technologically advanced.

PLANS FOR THE UPCOMING SCHOOL YEAR

(1= Strongly Agree, 5= Strongly Disagree)

STATEMENT	1	2	3	4	5
I plan to make new friends	56.2	23.7	14.6	4.2	1.3
Getting my drivers' license next year is my most important goal	26.6	17.1	16.4	10.1	29.7
I plan to participate in sports activities	38.4	14.0	10.7	13.4	23.5
I plan to take a broad variety of classes	30.3	34.5	25.7	6.2	3.3
I will seek employment opportunities	37.9	32.0	14.7	8.2	7.2
I want to improve my grades	65.0	26.5	6.2	1.6	.7
Overcrowding is a serious problem at my school	20.5	16.9	21.9	19.2	21.5
I believe my school needs to have more books and materials available for the students	26.9	20.7	26.2	14.1	12.1
My school needs to be more technologically advanced.	26.6	28.9	22.6	13.8	8.2

THEIR SCHOOLS

Despite their acknowledgment of some shortcomings in their schools, teens today rate their schools very highly. When asked to grade their school's performance, 73% of today's students gave their schools a "grade" of *B* or better, up from 66% last year. By comparison, 75% of students surveyed in 1983 gave their schools a similar rating, and 77% of 1974 students indicated their schools were "doing a good job."

Students who attend private schools rated their schools significantly higher than did public school students. Almost 90% attending private schools gave their schools *A* or *B* marks; a total of 71.4% of students in public schools gave their schools *A*s and *B*s. In addition, those students from households earning $50,000 or more per year had higher perceptions of their schools' quality than those with lower income.

Students who gave their schools *A*s and *B*s think positively about their schools in general. They believe their schools provide courses relevant to their future, offer opportunity for open discussion, and provide sufficient personal attention; these students report only a moderate level of discipline problems. Conversely, those who evaluated their schools with a grade of *C* or below reported a lack of interesting and relevant classes, little personalized instruction, and more discipline problems.

GRADES AND HOMEWORK

As in 1974 and 1983, grading systems appear to be a minor issue for students in 1996 and 1997. In 1997, 85% of students claim they are satisfied with their school's grading system; this is even higher than reported last year (80%).

Homework and studying, however, are not very high on teens' lists of activities. They spend relatively little time on schoolwork outside of class. Student self-reports of study habits show that 69.3% spend seven hours or less per week on homework, while 29% spend two hours or less. On average, students report 6.59 hours of homework per week, including weekends. This is slightly higher than the 51 minutes per day (including weekends) reported last year and lower than the 1 hour, 10 minutes per day reported in 1983. Despite the relatively small amount of time devoted to homework, however, more than a third of the teens today indicated that their teachers required too much outside the class period.

Students' perceptions of their schools' quality appear highly related to the amount of time they spend on homework. Students who rate their

schools highly (*A* or *B*) reported doing an average of 1.5 hours more per week than those who rated their schools with a *C*, and an average of 2 hours and 20 minutes more than those who rated their schools with a *D* or *F*. Interestingly, criticism of the amount of homework required did not vary much among these same groups. It appears that either the students who put more effort into homework like their schools better or that the better schools demand more from their students.

Girls spend, on average, nearly 1.5 hours more per week on homework than boys do. Average study times also varied significantly for other groups, with older teens studying more than younger teens, private school students more than public, and those studying a college prep curriculum more than those studying a technical/vocational curriculum.

VIEWS ON THEIR EDUCATION

Percentages of Agreement/Disagreement
with Statements about their Education

1997 STUDENT OPINIONS	AGREE	DISAGREE
I am very satisfied with my school's grading system	85.0	15.0
My school has courses which teach me things I can use after graduating	80.6	19.4
I believe my school's rules on student conduct are too strict	39.9	60.1
My classes are too much of a challenge	18.6	81.4
I receive the personal attention I need from my teachers	63.0	37.7
Discipline is a very serious problem in my school	37.8	62.2
My school needs more exciting and interesting classes	73.6	26.4
My teachers require too much work outside the class period	37.8	62.2
My classes offer opportunities for open discussion in the classroom	75.6	24.4

DISCIPLINE

A total of 37.8% of students surveyed agree strongly or somewhat that "discipline is a very serious problem in my school." This is down from 45% of students surveyed in 1996.

Students' perception of the discipline problem appears related to their overall ratings of their schools. Those who rated their schools with an *A* or *B* were less likely than others to agree that discipline is a serious problem. Public school students were more likely to perceive discipline as a problem than those who attend private schools.

Interestingly, while those students who rated their schools *C* or below are most likely to perceive discipline as a problem, they are also most likely

to complain that school rules on conduct are too strict. The dual complaints of these students may be a sign of their overall unhappiness with their schools.

COURSES

Although they give their schools high marks overall, about three-quarters of the students wish their classes were more exciting and interesting. Less than a fifth of students contend their courses "are too much of a challenge."

In 1974 and 1983, students rated mathematics and English as the most important courses offered at their schools. According to today's students, computer usage/programming has now joined math and English as one of the "basics." Interestingly, in 1974, computer courses were not even on the students' list of classes, and they were just barely coming into the students' academic curricula in 1983.

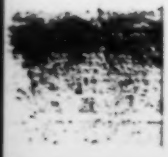
When asked to rate 16 different subjects on their importance, students chose computer classes as the top subject. A total of 92.6% of the students said computer courses were either "very important" or "fairly important."

Math classes and English classes almost tied for second place, with 92.1% and 91.5% respectively, considering them "very important" or "fairly important."

Substantial numbers of students also recognize that science is an important subject; 87.2% rated the subject "very important" or "fairly important."

Business classes became important to students in the '80s and remain relatively important. Nearly 84% of students rated business/commercial classes as "very important" or "fairly important." However, among all subjects studied, business and government have suffered the greatest declines in perceived importance since 1983.

Math and computer usage/programming were rated similarly by both college prep students and technical/vocational students. This may indicate that students recognize the role of technology in all careers today. Not surprisingly, the more academic subjects such as English, science, history/social studies, government, and foreign languages were more important to college prep students.



Girls consider many academic subjects more important than boys do; as in 1983, girls gave higher ratings than boys to subjects such as English and foreign languages. Boys and girls rated computer usage and science similarly in terms of importance. These ratings may point to female students' continued interest in and awareness of non-traditional career paths available to women today.

Girls continue to give higher importance ratings than boys to subjects such as sex education/health and family living/home economics. On the other hand, boys gave physical education and vocational classes higher ratings than did girls.

RATINGS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF COURSES

% Rating Courses as Very Important or Fairly Important

COURSE	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE
1. Computer usage/programming	92.6	94.0	91.3
2. Mathematics	92.1	95.5	89.3
3. English	91.5	86.4	96.0
4. Science	87.2	88.3	86.3
5. Business/commercial	83.9	87.8	80.6
6. History/social studies	76.8	75.5	77.8
7. Sex education/health	76.7	74.0	79.0
8. Government	75.7	72.0	78.9
9. Family living/home economics	68.1	59.1	75.9
10. Vocational	66.4	76.8	57.4
11. Foreign languages	65.4	57.6	72.2
12. Physical education	57.4	62.3	53.1
13. Religion	43.5	41.3	45.4
14. Art	42.7	40.9	44.3
15. Music	39.1	36.2	41.7
16. Drama	26.7	20.7	32.0

Interestingly, three of the courses that students consider most important are also the courses they report liking most: computer usage/programming, mathematics and science. A total of 53% of students said computer courses were their favorites; 45.2% said math was their favorite class, and 43.7% said science was the course they most liked. Girls are equally likely as boys to report liking computer usage and programming, math, and science.

Foreign language and government classes were voted most disliked (36.5% of students said government was their most disliked class, and 33.8% said foreign language study was the most disliked).

TEACHERS

Overall, students generally have faith that their teachers are interested in them and their concerns; 76.3% (up from 70% in 1996) say that teachers are "always interested" or "usually interested" in their students and their concerns. While a similar proportion (78.7%) believe that teachers are accessible to discuss their problems and concerns (up from 70% in 1996), only 66.3% of students think that teachers show an understanding of those problems and concerns (up from 57% in 1996).

Those students who rated the overall quality of their schools with an *A* or *B* were more likely to rate their teachers as being interested, understanding and accessible than those who rated their schools with a *C* or lower.

PRINCIPALS

In 1983, students expressed overwhelming praise for their principals and their interest in and concern for students. In contrast, students today award their principals substantially lower marks.

While a majority (61.3%) of students believe that their principals are "always interested" or "usually interested" in students and their concerns, this contrasts sharply with the 90% of students who gave similar marks in 1983.

Students are even less certain that their principals understand students and their problems. Only half (52%) stated that principals "completely understand" or "usually understand" their problems and concerns.

The youth of today are split in terms of considering their principals accessible to discuss student problems and concerns. About half (51.1%) think that their principals are "always" or "usually" available to talk with them. Accessibility, like the ratings of principals' interest and understanding, varied with students' overall estimation of their schools. The ratings students gave their principals were consistent by age, gender, region of the country, and public and private school attendance.

GUIDANCE COUNSELORS

Today's students appear to have more confidence in their counselors and view them with a broader perspective than students in 1983. Students also express more confidence in their counselors than in either their teachers or their principals. Three-quarters of students view counselors

as being "always" or "usually" interested in students and their problems and concerns (76.6%), understanding of those problems and concerns (71.3%) and accessible to discuss those problems and concerns (73.3%). As with teachers and principals, student evaluations of guidance counselors' interest, understanding, and accessibility are strongly related to students overall assessment of their schools; those who give their schools a grade of *A* or *B* rate their counselors higher than those who award their schools a *C* or lower.

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

School clubs, athletic teams, student government, and musical groups continue to be popular among today's students. Three-quarters (76%) of the students surveyed reported that they are involved in some form of school-related activity. However, reported involvement in school activities is down from 1983, when more than 80% reported participation.

SCHOOL SPORTS

By far, athletic teams and clubs are the school activities that involve the largest numbers of students. Almost half (47%) reported involvement with their school's athletic programs (up from 42% in 1996). While substantially more boys than girls report participation in school athletics, reported participation by both boys and girls is lower than in 1983.

ACADEMIC AND SERVICE CLUBS

Students report participating in a variety of school clubs and organizations. About 22% of students belong to honor societies, including the National Honor Society. Volunteer and service organizations draw participation from 23.4% (up from 12% in the 1996 survey).

Overall, female students appear more involved in academic and service clubs than male students. With the exceptions of sports and science clubs, girls report higher involvement in school activities than boys.

MUSIC

Approximately 17% of all students said they play in school bands or orchestras; another 16% are in school choirs or choral groups. Unlike sports, the proportion of students involved in music is as strong today as in 1983.

FAMILY LIFE

THE LEVEL OF DISAGREEMENT AND DISCORD SO EVIDENT BETWEEN young people and their parents' generation 30 years ago has long since dissipated in succeeding generations. As the century comes to a close, young people appear generally in accord with the adult world and have fairly happy relationships with their parents. They are quick to note that their parents' rules are strictly enforced, but they are equally willing to acknowledge that these rules are fair. They also express confidence that their parents are not only interested in their problems and concerns but are also accessible and understanding.

Students generally report getting along well with their parents. Overall, relationships with fathers are viewed as slightly more difficult than relationships with mothers. On a scale of 1 to 4, with 4 signifying "no difficulty at all" and 1 meaning "a lot of difficulty," teens rated the difficulty of their relationship with their mothers with an average of 3.25, while relationships with fathers received a rating of 3.13.

Girls report more difficulty getting along with their mothers than do boys. Boys and girls rate the difficulty with fathers similarly. However, the stepparent relationship is significantly more difficult than the relationship with natural parents; girls report more difficulties with stepparents than do boys.

GETTING ALONG WITH FAMILY MEMBERS

(Among those with a relationship)

RELATIONSHIP	TOTAL	MALES	FEMALES
1. Mother	3.25	3.23	3.16
2. Father	3.13	3.16	3.11
3. Stepbrothers	3.10	3.14	3.00
4. Stepsisters	3.40	3.40	3.40
5. Brothers	3.02	3.12	2.92
6. Sisters	2.72	2.73	2.71
7. Stepfather	2.87	3.23	2.59
8. Stepmother	2.92	3.20	2.75

Ranked from 1.0 (a lot of difficulty) to 4.0 (no difficulty at all)

Students express a strong confidence in the caring and interest of their parents. The overwhelming majority (90.7%) believes that parents are "always interested" or "usually interested" in them and their concerns. Further, three quarters (76.7%) express confidence that parents understand their problems and concerns. Most teens also considered their parents accessible (91.1%) to discuss their problems and concerns.

RULES

Over 90% of students reported having household rules regarding drinking alcohol, and over 80% say their parents have rules regarding completion of schoolwork, completion of household chores, curfews, and smoking.

The most frequently cited rules are applied equally to girls and boys. However, more girls than boys say their parents have rules regarding time on the phone and dating. Two-thirds of the girls said they have rules regarding dating, compared with 42% of the boys. On the other hand, more boys report being affected by rules regarding career preparation and time spent on hobbies and sports.

Those who have rules generally consider them to be strictly enforced. The most strictly enforced rules relate to drinking and smoking, followed by schoolwork, curfews, and household responsibilities. Large percentages of students characterize most of their family rules as "strictly enforced."

AREAS IN WHICH PARENTS HAVE RULES

(Enforcement and fairness among those who have a rule)

AREA	% HAVE RULES		% RULES ARE STRICTLY ENFORCED		% RULES ARE FAIR	
	G	B	G	B	G	B
1. Drinking alcohol	91.9	75.7	92.7	94.4	91.0	90.8
2. Completion of schoolwork	82.9	75.7	84.6	87.9	92.0	88.4
3. Completion of household chores	81.1	71.5	79.1	83.1	84.6	81.8
4. Curfew	82.3	71.1	80.9	82.2	81.5	77.2
5. Smoking	87.4	70.1	91.7	93.7	93.7	92.4
6. Time on phone	52.7	45.6	65.0	70.6	69.0	65.9
7. Dating	54.8	44.5	76.6	80.5	81.1	74.3
8. Attending religious services	51.5	43.6	74.1	81.3	89.2	89.9
9. Clothing styles/hair	51.2	36.8	50.3	68.7	87.2	82.2
10. Selection of friends	40.1	31.7	63.7	67.0	80.8	74.1
11. Taking care of younger siblings	38.3	31.0	66.9	72.9	83.2	70.9
12. Preparation for career	41.3	23.2	72.9	77.7	96.3	89.2
13. Time on hobbies/sports	32.6	22.1	56.0	58.3	89.8	86.3

Despite these strongly enforced rules, the students generally consider the rules "very fair" or "somewhat fair." Students overwhelmingly believe that parents' rules regarding smoking, drinking, and completion of schoolwork are fair. Similarly, more than 80% view their parents' rules in other areas as fair. "Time on the phone" was the only rule that fewer than three-quarters of the students said was fair.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

THE WORLD AROUND THEM

In 1983, 1996, and 1997, teens cited "drugs" as the single greatest problem facing teens. However, the degree to which this was considered the top problem has fluctuated. In 1983, almost half the teens said drugs were the top problem; last year, 21.1% named it as the leading problem, and in 1997, 35.6% cited drugs among the worst influences on youth.

A quarter of the students named "peer pressure" as the worst influence on teens today. Significant numbers of students also mentioned violence, gangs, alcohol, and crime as among the most negative influences on the nation's youth.

These young people's views on the worst influences are generally consistent, regardless of the teens' ages, income level, or geographic location. For example, teens in rural areas and smaller towns are as likely as urban or suburban teens to cite crime and violence among the worst influences on youth today.

WORST INFLUENCES FACING YOUTH TODAY

PROBLEM	1997	1996
Drugs	35.6%	21.1%
Peer pressure	25.4	20.0
Sex/poor morals	17.7	11.9
Violence	14.1	11.9
Gangs	11.4	11.7
Alcohol	10.2	4.2
Crime	9.9	2.9
Cigarettes	8.1	2.5
Television	5.4	2.1
Unemployment	3.3	1.9
Poverty	3.0	1.8
Parents/elders	2.7	1.4
Political leaders	2.4	0.6
Pornography	2.4	0.4
Music	1.8	0.4
Movies	0.9	0.3

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

NATIONAL PROBLEMS

In 1983, teens said the threats of nuclear disaster and world war were the greatest global issues and that economic problems were the largest national issues. However, in 1996 and 1997, the decline of moral values and crime and violence are viewed as the biggest national issues. AIDS and drugs were the next two most frequently mentioned national problems in both the 1996 and 1997 surveys.

For the most part, students do not foresee these problems being resolved in the near future. When they were asked their opinion about what the greatest national problems in the year 2005 would be, the "decline of the family and moral and social values" was still the issue most often mentioned. However, many more students said that environmental pollution and deterioration would be America's greatest challenge in 2005. Far fewer teens identified crime and violence — the number two issue today — as the country's greatest problem eight years from now.

GREATEST NATIONAL PROBLEMS

PROBLEMS	What 1997 Teens See as Greatest National Problems Now	What 1997 Teens See as Greatest National Problems in 2005
Decline of family/moral & social values	33.8	19.8
Crime/Violence	30.2	18.9
AIDS	23.4	15.3
Drugs	18.6	10.5
Environmental pollution/ deterioration	7.8	19.5
Health care	7.5	7.2
Government/U.S. budget	8.1	10.8
National debt	8.1	14.4
Poverty/unemployment	10.5	9.0
Terrorism	6.9	7.8
Racial tension/discrimination	11.1	5.7
Inflation	4.8	8.4

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

THE FUTURE

THE FUTURE IS A BRIGHT, INVITING PLACE TO MOST TEENS. THEY have high hopes for college, careers, families, success, and happiness.

Almost 62% of the 1997 students said they planned to attend a four year college or university after high school, significantly more than the 54% who planned to do so in 1983 and far more than in 1974. Plans to attend two-year colleges have also increased; today, more than a fifth of the teens indicate they will enroll in a community college program.

More students today also plan to get a job after high school; the percentage of teens saying that work was in their post-high school plans increased from 37% in 1983 to 47% in 1996 and 1997. This increase may be a reflection of the students' awareness of the high costs of financing postsecondary education and training. While more students indicate they will seek further education, they also recognize that they will probably have to work to help pay for it.

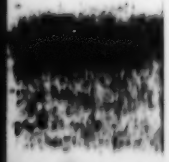
Only 17% of today's teens said that marriage was in their immediate plans after high school, and only 8.4% reported that they would be enlisting in one of the armed services following high school graduation.

Attending a four-year college is in the immediate plans of more girls than boys, while boys are more likely than girls to be intending to get a job, attend a training/vocational school, or join the armed forces. Younger and older teens have similar plans after high school.

PLANS AFTER HIGH SCHOOL

(Students could check as many as applied)

PLANS	1997	1996
4-year college/university	61.7%	60.6%
Get a job	47.6%	47.6%
2-year college	22.5%	14.7%
Travel	17.4%	17.0%
Get married	17.4%	15.2%
Training/vocational school	10.2%	13.0%
Join armed services	8.4%	9.6%
Join volunteer organization	3.6%	3.3%



Teens in 1997 see the pursuit of additional education or training as both a practical means of securing their future financially and a way to contribute to the world. When asked what their one reason was for seeking more schooling, a third of the teens said the greatest motivating factor was a better chance at "getting a good paying job." The second most often cited reason for going on to college or vocational training after high school was to "have the ability to make a difference or change things for the better."

THE "ONE" REASON MOTIVATING TEENS TO SEEK ADDITIONAL SCHOOLING AFTER HIGH SCHOOL

REASON	1997
Get a good paying job	33.7%
Have the ability to make a difference/change things for the better	22.5%
Independence	14.5%
Have more options	13.3%
Self-enrichment	9.2%
Mechanism to get further education	2.9%
Follow in footsteps of someone I admire	2.9%
Social status/acceptance	1.6%
Family acceptance/pressures	1.3%

And what do today's teens want to be when they grow up? For the most part, their career choices have not changed much over the last decade. Careers in medicine and teaching are at the top of the list of choices, just as they were in 1983.

However, students are less likely in 1997 to aspire to careers in engineering than they were in 1983. Further, computer careers were the most often cited career choice among the 1983 students; now, it appears that today's students see computers more of a component in all careers and less of an appealing end in itself.

The female students of the '90s have set their career heights as high as those of the male students. Girls are almost as likely as boys to indicate they want to be medical doctors or have a career in business, and they now name "law" as their chosen field more often than do boys. However, traditionally female-dominated professions, such as teaching and nursing, are still the choice of more girls than boys.

TOP CAREER CHOICES

FIELD	1996 Total	1997 Total	1997 Males	1997 Females
Medical doctor	6.5%	5.7%	5.8%	5.6%
Teaching	6.2%	9.6%	7.7%	11.2%
Business	6.1%	5.1%	5.2%	5.0%
Engineering	5.2%	3.0%	4.5%	1.7%
Veterinarian	4.9%	2.4%	0%	4.5%
Computer software development	4.3%	5.7%	9.7%	2.2%
Misc. medical	4.2%	5.7%	2.6%	8.4%
Law	3.4%	4.5%	2.6%	6.1%
Law enforcement	3.1%	4.2%	5.3%	3.4%
Nursing	3.4%	4.2%	0.6%	7.3%
Music	3.7%	3.6%	3.9%	3.4%
Professional sports	3.1%	3.6%	5.8%	1.7%

In addition to soaring career plans, today's teens also have great expectations of their earning power. When asked what they expected to be their entry-level career salary, only a third said they would be making less than $25,000 per year.

Girls continue to have lower salary expectations than boys, but the gap is decreasing. In 1983 girls expected to earn an average of 21% less than boys when beginning their careers; that shortfall in 1996 decreased to 11% and even further in 1997. Boys are more likely to project entry-level salaries for themselves in excess of $50,000 a year than are girls.

SALARY EXPECTATIONS

What salary do you expect to earn per year when your begin your career?

SALARY	1997 Total	Males	Females
Under 15,000	7.7%	4.0%	11.0%
15,000 - 24,999	25.7	22.7	28.3
25,000 - 34,999	31.6	31.3	31.8
35,000 - 49,999	18.0	22.0	14.5
50,000 - 74,999	10.8	12.0	9.8
Over 75,000	6.2	8.0	4.6

Given today's teens' big plans for career success, it is not surprising that they view their work lives as integral to their formulas for personal success. More than 97% of teens said that work and career were either "very important" or "fairly important" to their own feelings of personal success. But as many teens said that "personal development and satisfaction" were also "very" or "fairly" important.

Further, these teens appear to seek a balanced life, acknowledging that careers and work are very significant but also strongly wanting a family life. A total of 88% of the teens said that their immediate families were important to their definitions of personal success. And 95% of the survey respondents included "friendships" as an important ingredient in their personal success.

PERSONAL SUCCESS

Please indicate how important you feel each of the following will be for your own personal success.

FACTOR	Very Important	Fairly Important
Work and career	81.3%	16.3%
Immediate family	58.4%	30.0%
Personal development & satisfaction	65.4%	31.8%
Extended family	20.4%	52.4%
Friendships	53.1%	41.7%
Religious/spiritual activities	36.0%	27.1%
Making a contribution to society	27.6%	50.0%

The teens' desire for a balance between career and family, comfort and contentment is further revealed in their answers to the question, "What is the one thing you want most out of life?" The most frequently named was "happiness." Career success ranked only fourth, below happiness, a long and enjoyable life, and marriage and family.

Girls were slightly more likely than boys to pick "happiness" as their top choice and significantly more likely to choose "marriage and family" as the one thing they most wanted out of life. However, they also were slightly more likely to select "career success" as the most sought-after life goal than were the boys. Boys, however, were about twice as likely as the girls to indicate "financial success" as their top priority.

WHAT IS THE ONE THING YOU WANT MOST OUT OF LIFE?

	1997 ALL	1997 MALES	1997 FEMALES
Happiness	**32.9%**	**29.0%**	**36.3%**
Long/enjoyable life	**14.1%**	**18.1%**	**10.6%**
Marriage/family	11.4%	7.1%	15.1%
Career success	**10.8%**	**9.7%**	**11.7%**
Personal success	9.9%	7.7%	11.7%
Financial success	**9.3%**	**12.9%**	**6.1%**
Religious satisfaction	6.3%	7.7%	5.0%
Love	3.9%	3.2%	4.2%
Health	2.7%	1.3%	3.9%
Friends	2.1%	1.3%	2.8%
Education	1.8%	1.9%	1.7%
Sense of personal contribution to society	1.5%	1.3%	1.7%

MARRIAGE AND CHILDREN

In keeping with the findings that indicate families and home life are very important to today's teens, the great majority of survey respondents see themselves as married and with families in the future. However, in comparison to their 1983 counterparts, teens today expect to tie the knot slightly later in life and have fewer children. On average, students in 1997 feel that a person's mid-twenties are the ideal age range for marriage. In 1983, teens said 22 or 23 was the best age. Only 9% of the survey respondents felt that marrying in their teens was ideal.

IDEAL AGE FOR MARRIAGE

IDEAL AGE	ALL TEENS	MALES	FEMALES	YOUNGER TEENS	OLDER TEENS
Under 20	9.0%	7.1%	10.7%	12.0%	7.0%
21 - 25	61.3	58.9	63.3	60.8%	61.6%
26 - 30	27.1	29.8	24.9	24.8%	28.6%
Over 30	2.6	4.3	1.2	2.4%	2.7%

A total of 86% of teens in 1997 report that they intend to have children. While only about 14% said they did not want to have children, this is an increase from 9.2% among teens surveyed last year.

Today's youth also apparently want slightly fewer children than their peers who were surveyed in the '80s. Girls say they want an average of 2.3 children, down from 2.5 in 1983. Boys want an average of 2.1 children, compared with 2.3 in 1983. Large families with four or more children are the ideal for only 7.6% of today's students.

NUMBER OF CHILDREN DESIRED

NUMBER	1997 TOTAL	MALES	FEMALES
NONE	13.8%	17.2%	10.8%
1	12.5%	15.2%	10.2%
2	53.8%	49.7%	57.4%
3	12.2%	12.6%	11.9%
4 or more	7.6%	5.3%	9.7%

The number of children desired has declined slightly since 1983, from 2.5 to 2.2 in both 1996 and 1997.

HORATIO ALGER ASSOCIATION

FOUNDED IN 1947 TO COMBAT A GROWING ATTITUDE AMONG YOUNG people that economic opportunity was a thing of the past, the Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans, Inc., is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit educational organization. The Association strives to motivate and educate our nation's young people about the economic and personal opportunities afforded them by the promise of the American free enterprise system.

The Association brings the "Horatio Alger heroes" of today together with those of tomorrow by bestowing the Horatio Alger Award annually; hosting Horatio Alger Youth Seminars; sponsoring the National Scholars Conference; awarding more than $1,000,000 annually in grants and college scholarships; and providing a placement service.

MEMBERSHIP — Composed solely of Horatio Alger Award winners. Consisting of nearly 500 Horatio Alger Award recipients, the membership represents all walks of American life. Members have made outstanding contributions in the fields of science, medicine, business, entertainment, athletics, law and jurisprudence, religion, education, and the arts.

EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES — The Horatio Alger Association focuses on recognizing outstanding Americans while providing a critical communication link to motivate and educate America's youth.

THE HORATIO ALGER AWARD: This honor is presented to Americans each year who serve as role models for excelling professionally in their respective fields and who make significant contributions to improving their communities and their nation.

HORATIO ALGER NATIONAL SCHOLARS AND SPECIALIZED GRANTS: More than $1,000,000 in grants and college scholarships are awarded annually to promising secondary school students who have overcome adversity and are recognized for their outstanding community involvement.

HORATIO ALGER YOUTH SEMINARS: Secondary schools in every state and the District of Columbia are invited to apply and are selected annually to host seminars focusing on career opportunities and public or community service.

HORATIO ALGER NATIONAL SCHOLARS CONFERENCE: All recipients of the Horatio Alger National Scholarship attend, as guests of the Association, an educational conference to meet with Association Members and gain an enhanced understanding of the American free enterprise system and a deeper insight into the operation of the federal government.

HORATIO ALGER COLLEGIATE PARTNERS: A premier network of colleges and universities from across the country works in partnership with the Association to provide special scholarship and financial aid opportunities for Horatio Alger National Scholars to attend their schools.

HORATIO ALGER INTERNSHIP AND PLACEMENT SERVICE: An opportunity to gain practical work experience while attending college, with the possibility of permanent placement following graduation, is provided to students selected as Horatio Alger National Scholars.

HORATIO ALGER SCHOOL OF EXCELLENCE: Each year, a secondary school is recognized for outstanding achievement in working with students facing adversity, and a $5,000 educational grant is awarded to that school's district to further its work with youth.

PUBLIC AWARENESS — The Association strives to increase public awareness of its educational services and carries the Horatio Alger message to millions of American families.

TELEVISION BROADCAST OF *ONLY IN AMERICA: THE ANNUAL HORATIO ALGER AWARDS*: Since 1993, the Annual Horatio Alger Awards has reached millions of American households through national broadcasts on PBS (1997 and 1996), CBS (1995), and NBC (1994 and 1993).

PARTNERSHIP WITH PBS TEACHER RESOURCE SERVICES: Through PBS's extensive educational network, the Annual Horatio Alger Awards broadcast is available to over 16,000 school districts across the nation with a curriculum guide for use in the classroom.

WORLD WIDE WEB HOMEPAGE: The homepage features biographical information about Association Members and Horatio Alger National Scholars as well as descriptions of the educational programs and activities of the Horatio Alger Association. (http://www.horatioalger.com)

PUBLICATIONS

ONLY IN AMERICA OPPORTUNITY STILL KNOCKS announces the Horatio Alger Award recipients and National Scholarship Award recipients annually.

QUOTATIONS: SUCCESS SECRETS OF POWER THINKERS is a collection of inspirational quotations and biographical information from the Members of the Horatio Alger Association.

THE FORUM, the Association's semi-annual newsletter, provides current information about Members, Association activities, and educational issues.

STRIVE AND SUCCEED, the Association's student newsletter, provides current information about the National Scholars, Association activities, and educational programs.

CHARTING THE COURSE: THE NEXT 50 YEARS details the Association's recent accomplishments and presents plans for future achievements.

1996 MOOD OF AMERICAN YOUTH reports the results of a national survey on the attitudes and beliefs of teenagers conducted in partnership with the National Association of Secondary School Principals.

1997 STATE OF OUR NATION'S YOUTH reports the results of the Association's annual survey on the attitudes and opinions of teenagers.

THE NATIONAL SCHOLARS SURVEY and ***THE GRADUATES*** highlight the accomplishments of the Horatio Alger National Scholars from 1984 to the present.

ONLY IN AMERICA: A LEGACY OF ACHIEVEMENT and ***AN INVESTMENT IN AMERICA'S FUTURE*** provide options for supporting the educational programs and activities of the Association and contributing to the organization's endowment fund.

Copyright © Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans, Inc., 1997.
All rights reserved.

Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans, Inc.
99 Canal Center Plaza
Alexandria, Virginia 22314
Phone (703) 684-9444 FAX: (703) 548-3822